

Six European countries are expected to end coal by 2025: France (2022), Portugal (2022), Slovakia (2023), the UK (2024), Ireland (2025) and Italy (2025), according to Europe Beyond Coal. Hungary's last coal power plant will be shut down in 2025 instead of 2030, Hungary's secretary of state for EU affairs announced earlier this week.

"Our plan is to reach 90% carbon neutral electricity generation by 2030," said Attila Steiner, on 2 March at the annual summit of the Powering Past Coal Alliance.

Budapest intends to achieve this by maintaining its existing nuclear generation capacity and increasing solar power to 6 GW – three times more than the country's existing nuclear capacity, Steiner said.

"Thirdly, we would like to phase out the lignite-fired blocs of our last remaining coal-fired power plant by 2025 – the Matra power plant," he added, saying Hungary will benefit from EU funding to retrain coal workers affected by the closure.

The announcement was hailed by green activists as a major victory for the climate and workers affected by the plant's closure, who will receive support from the EU's just transition fund.

"The confirmation of the closure of the 884 MW Matra coal power plant is a critical step in planning for a just transition for workers and impacted communities," said Europe Beyond Coal, a green pressure group.

"The Hungarian government's decision to halve the time it will take to exit coal tells you everything you need to know about the state of Europe's collapsing coal industry," said Kathrin Gutmann, campaign director at Europe Beyond Coal.

"It shows that when governments actually stop and look at the cold hard economic and political realities of coal, not only do they want to get rid of it – they decide to do so as quickly as possible," she added in a statement.

Hungarian President János Áder announced the country's original plan to exit coal by 2030 at the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York in 2019.

Hungary has signed up to an EU-wide commitment to reach climate neutrality by 2050 and "welcomes" EU plans to toughen the bloc's climate goals for 2030, Steiner said.

A 200 MW solar farm is now planned for the plant's site, illustrating how the clean energy transition can replace coal jobs and mine closures with new opportunities, green campaigners said.

However, they were disappointed that a 500 MW gas plant will also be built on the Matra site, warning that this risked locking Hungary into more carbon-emitting fuels for years to come.

Source: euractiv.com

